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ABSTRACT

This document is an outline for a module which can be inserted, in whole or in part, in community college courses on California and/or Southwest United States history, Mexican-American or Chicano history, Mexican history, and United States history. The module examines the close ties--political, economic, and social--between Mexico and California during an historical period that was crucial in shaping the later patterns of development in each. Focus of the module is primarily on the Mexican immigration to California and the factors surrounding that migration. Goals of the module, topics for lecture/discussion in each of the module's units, and suggested readings for students and background readings for instructors for each unit are included. A bibliography is appended. (JDS)

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MEXICO AND CALIFORNIA: 1900-1920

Project Mexico
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JC 770 140

MEXICO AND CALIFORNIA: 1900-1920

A module that can be inserted, in whole or in part, in community college courses on California and/or Southwest United States history, Mexican-American or Chicano history, Mexican history, and United States history.

The module is an examination of the close ties--economic, political, social--between Mexico and California during an historical period that was crucial in shaping the later patterns of development in each. The module will use as its central focus the most visible representations of those ties: the Mexican immigration to California and the factors surrounding that migration.

The goals of the module are:

1. to develop an awareness of the continuous and important interdependence of Mexico and California

2. to examine the impact on California of internal developments in Mexico in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century

3. to examine the impact on Mexico of internal developments in the United States in the same period.

It is expected that as a result of the lectures and the supplementary readings the student will be able to discuss in class the relationship between Mexico and California from a variety of perspectives--historical, political, economic, social, cultural. Further, the student will be expected to trace those ties to present-day patterns in his/her community and to discuss how they are manifested in attitudes, housing, education, employment, the role of labor unions and political parties. etc. In addition, the student should be able to discuss any one of the Mexico-California ties as a complete chain of events and circumstances (e.g., following migrant labor from its origins in the Mexican context, to its introduction to California and its impact on the state's economy and politics, and finally to the effects on the Mexican context of this large-scale ebb and flow of population).

The major student contribution to the module will be a paper and/or class presentation on a topic from the period (e.g., rural and urban unions; housing patterns; community life in Mexico). Students may work individually or in small teams on this project. It is strongly recommended that the paper or presentation employ an oral history approach, with the student(s) interviewing a first- or second-generation immigrant from Mexico (preferably a family member, where possible) on their experiences concerning the selected topic. The instructor should consult at least twice with the student(s) as the project is being formulated and carried out.

Student performance in the module will be assessed on the basis of participation in class discussions and the quality of the paper or class

presentation. Special attention will be paid to evidence that the student is able to identify and draw together key concepts and processes that are brought out in the class lectures and the supplementary readings.

I. Lecture and class discussion topic: The Mexican Context to 1910.

This unit will focus on rural Mexican life prior to the 1910 Revolution, and may be divided into between two and four class sessions. Organizing themes are:

1. The immobility of traditional rural and village life.

The role of ceremonial life and religion in keeping individuals tied to the local web of land, family and tradition. Nineteenth century developments that further strengthened the rigidity: the 1857 Reforms and the consolidation of Church and village lands by wealthy hacendados; the spread of debt peonage; political control by the Díaz regime through federal rurales (police) and caciques (bosses); the use of the positivist philosophy to justify social immobility and control by the few.

2. Economic development under Díaz.

The static conditions of the rural areas contrasted with the rapid development of an infrastructure--railroads, electricity, cities--that served the export-based economy of cotton, sugar, minerals, and tropical products. (Rail lines and major areas of export production should be made clear on wall maps.) The role of U.S. and other foreign capital investment in land, utilities, manufacturing, transportation. The negative effects of this imbalance on rural Mexico (shortage of arable land for peasants; drop in production of subsistence crops; growing landless peasantry).

Readings for students:

Galarza, ch. 1
Herring, ch. 21 (pp. 325-338), or Parkes, pp. 277-322
Hansen, ch. 2 (pp. 11-29)

Background reading for instructor:

Herring, ch. 20, 21 (pp. 314-338)
Hansen, ch. 2 (pp. 11-40); ch. 6 (133-171)

II. Lecture and class discussion topic: California to 1910.

This unit will center on the development of economic and social patterns in California after the Mexican War, highlighting the evolving position of Mexican migrants and Mexican-Americans within those patterns. The unit may be divided into two or three class sessions. Organizing themes are:

1. Agriculture in California.

The disputes over Spanish land grants in California, following annexation to the United States. The evolution of agriculture in California in terms of the succession of dominant crops in the Central (San Joaquin), Salinas, and Imperial Valleys--cattle, wheat, vegetables, fruit--and the ways in which the development of each area was closely tied to railroad transportation to the Midwest and the East Coast. The alliance of large agricultural interests and the railroads, and increased monopolization of economic and political power in the state in the late nineteenth century.

2. Immigrant labor in California politics.

The struggle between large, high-investment agricultural concerns and small one-family farmers. The cyclical changes in U.S. immigration laws affecting foreign labor (alternating between favorable and restrictive) and the increased dependence of large agriculture in California on a succession of immigrant groups (Chinese, Japanese, Mexican, Filipino). Mexican labor as both a link in a chain of migrant groups and a long-standing phenomenon in California. Opposition of urban labor unions to migrant and immigrant labor.

Readings for students:

Acuna, pp. 123-146
McWilliams, Factories in the Field (optional)

Background reading for the instructor:

McWilliams, Factories in the Field
Divine
Santibañez

III. Lecture and class discussion topic: Mexican Immigration to California, 1900-1920.

The unit will examine the factors in Mexico that facilitated a large-scale migration in this period as well as those factors in the U.S. and California that attracted the migrants. The geographic origins and destinations of the migrants will be identified, and the resulting patterns of effects in California and in Mexico will be discussed. The unit may be divided into between five and eight class sessions. Organizing themes are:

1. "Push" factors in Mexico.

Brief review of the first lecture/discussion topic--rise in rural population and decline in food production; transportation network connecting Mexico and U.S.; etc. The 1910 Revolution as a breakdown in traditional ways of life and in the 19th century hacienda system.

2. "Pull" factors in the U.S. and California.

Growth of economic activities compatible with experience of potential Mexican laborers (e.g., railroads in Texas, the Southwest, California; agriculture, especially irrigation farming in the Imperial Valley and in Arizona; mining in Arizona). Higher wages in the U.S. and the facility of transportation from the border to inland areas. Restriction of Chinese and Japanese immigration in California. Negative effects of World War I on European immigration to the U.S. at the same time that demands for manpower in agriculture and manufacturing greatly increased.

3. Statistics on Mexican immigration to the U.S.

Factors affecting the accuracy, reliability and comprehensiveness of statistics on immigration: different record-keeping methods in U.S. and Mexico; entry taxes and oscillations in U.S. receptivity to foreign labor resulting in high level of undocumented immigration; frequent trips between Mexico and U.S. by many migrants; political uses of statistics.

4. Sources of Mexican immigration.

Taking into account the lack of absolute data, identification of immigrants by state or area of origin in Mexico. Deductions from such data as to immigrants' social position and economic background.

5. Mexican immigrants in California.

Immigration data and other sources used to identify points of entry, methods of labor contracting, migration routes within the state, areas of urban and rural concentration, rates of temporary and permanent return to Mexico. Patterns of participation and exclusion of Mexican migrants in labor unions, education, housing, etc. Links to local ("Anglo") society and culture as compared to traditional Mexican experience of immigrants (e.g., Church, extra-family support groups, economic activities, political processes).

6. Repercussions in Mexico.

Depopulation of rural areas because of migration and the Revolution. Economic benefits (e.g., remittances from workers in the U.S.) and drawbacks (e.g., drop in local productivity; dependence on economic cycles of the U.S.) for Mexico. Spread of new cultural patterns by returning migrants; relative instability of local market because of mobility of migrating portion of population. Political activity of anti-Díaz Liberal Party among Mexicans in U.S. cities.

Readings for students:

McWilliams, North from Mexico, ch. 9
McWilliams, Factories in the Field, ch. 6, 7

optional:

Gamio, The Mexican Immigrant
Spota
Castillo
Quinones

Background reading for the instructor:

McWilliams, North from Mexico, ch. 1-11
McWilliams, Ill Fares the Land
Gamio, Número, procedencia, y distribución
Womack
Grebler
Clark
Santibánez
Castillo
Quinones
Flores Macías

IV. Lecture and class discussion topic: Patterns for the Future, 1920-1976.

This unit reviews and summarizes the material covered in the module, discussing key aspects of contemporary Chicano and Mexican experience in California in terms of their roots in the 1900-1920 period. It may be covered in two or three class sessions, or may be expanded as part of the presentation of student interview and/or paper projects to the class. Organizing themes, in addition to those suggested by the student projects, are:

1. Access to economic opportunity.

   Constrained by residence status, educational experience, geographic location, language experience, prevailing political and economic climate.

2. Access to education.

   Affected by frequent geographic moves, experience in English language, economic possibilities (e.g., ability to forego child's income), cultural and social ostracism.

3. Growth of Chicano and/or Mexican "barrios."

   Physical separation reinforced by cultural and economic sanctions. Proximity to sources of employment: factories, fields, railroad yards.

4. Participation in political parties and labor unions.

Resident status, language barrier, lack of economic power as exclusionary factors in political opportunities. Strong resistence of U.S. labor unions to immigrant labor, growth of Mexican unions in Revolutionary period, presence in U.S. of exiled intellectuals and labor leaders as contributing elements in later (1920s and 1930s) development of agricultural unions among Mexican field workers in California.

5. Continuing ties to Mexico.

Seasonal nature of available work in U.S.; easy physical access to Mexico; improved relative economic status of Mexican workers in U.S.; oscillatory U.S. immigration/deportation policies; Mexican dependence on U.S. economy; exclusion from local U.S. social patterns.

6. Popular image of Mexican in California and the United States.

Historical roots of the idea that Mexican is unskilled, uneducated, semi-permanent and always interested in returning to Mexico, unwilling to assimilate to U.S. culture, etc.

Readings for students:

Robinson (selection from)
McWilliams, North from Mexico, ch. 10 (pp. 189-95)
Flores Macías (optional)

Background reading for instructor:

Robinson
López y Rivas
"Health, Relief, and Delinquency. . . ."

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